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A TALK WITH ZBIG

In Washington last week, Zbigniew Brzezinski was interviewed by NEWSWEEK Foreign Editor Russell Watson and diplomatic correspondent Scott Sullivan. Excerpts from their conversation:

NEWSWEEK: The President wants an "open" foreign policy. How is that working so far? Was it a problem, for example, that U.S. strategic-arms proposals were so thoroughly discussed in public before Cyrus Vance went to Moscow?

BRZEZINSKI: I don't agree with that. The SALT proposals were not discussed in detail in public before going to Moscow, but an effort was made to gain public support for the basic principles underlying these proposals. That effort, I believe, succeeded. The public does support our proposals, to a degree that I believe was not present a year or two ago when there were mounting suspicions of the nature of the SALT negotiating process.

Q. Then why did the Russians flatly reject the Administration's SALT proposals in Moscow?

A. They preferred their proposals to ours, but that is to be expected. I think we are getting down to business. I think both sides realize there is a mutual interest in negotiating arms limitations. And I hope that we will be able to move beyond that to something that is clearly in everyone's interest, and this is why the United States is taking the lead in proposing it—namely, arms reductions. And even more important, a freeze.

Q. Is Moscow angry at the President's human-rights campaign or anything else? Or is it being cooperative?

A. The Russians are realists. Obviously, from their point of view, they would prefer to have accommodations with us on some issues and the freedom to wage ideological competition, without us competing, on other issues. We are willing to accommodate with them on specific issues, but we are not prepared to play possum in the competition of ideas.

Q. As you see it, what is the proper role of the National Security Council?

A. I think the NSC has three essential functions. It is the President's operational staff, which means that my colleagues and I are here to help the President coordinate policy and integrate the implementation of policy. Secondly, we are the President's think tank, in the sense that we assist him in the development of a longer-term perspective on foreign policy, working very



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At work: Running Carter's 'think tank'

closely with the Secretary of State in that regard ... And thirdly, we are here to provide the President with an effective management arm on security questions ...

Q. To what extent do you consider yourself a policymaker?

A. I don't consider myself basically a policymaker, in the sense that the Secretary of State or the Secretary of Defense is a policymaker. I consider myself a facilitator of policymaking, and, secondly, I consider myself to be an adviser to the President.

Q. So far, you've been rather self-effacing in this job. Is that good for the NSC?

A. I don't think it's bad for the NSC. The NSC knows that its role relates directly to the President, and if the NSC serves the President well, in facilitating ... policymaking [and] offering counsel to [him] through myself, then ... it's performing the job well, whether there's much publicity or not.

Q. Some people expect that eventually you will try to undermine Secretary Vance and replace him. What do you say to that?

A. I consider it a point of pride—and I think Cy Vance, who happens to be truly a good friend of mine, feels the same way—to prove that cooperation among honorable people can be the norm and not the deviation in Washington. I consider it an aberration that so many people [here] seem to think that doing somebody in, intriguing against colleagues, has to be the routine and that the ability to cooperate decently is either only something very transitional or ... a sham. I will go further and say that we live in a time in which, given the complexity of the problems we face, cooperation on a team basis is the absolute precondition to any success we may have ...

I think it is absolutely essential that the Vice President, Vance and [Defense Secretary Harold] Brown, [Treasury Secretary Michael] Blumenthal and [CIA director Stansfield] Turner and myself prove we can work as a team. This doesn't mean we have to agree ... We do not. This does not mean that we cannot debate ... We do. This doesn't even exclude some fights. We occasionally may even have those. But [we do not have to undercut] each other. I happen to think that Vance is a much better Secretary of State than I could ever be. And I happen to think that maybe I'm not altogether unsuited for the job I hold, and that hopefully others will feel that maybe I am not performing too badly in it. And therefore, I don't have any sort of inner desire to alter the arrangement.